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Good morning.

You've probably already been welcomed to Washington, but let me add mine. We're happy to have you here.

You should be particularly thankful to the person in the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association who scheduled this meeting for late September.

You missed our miserable summer. The worst part was the air. It was so bad at times that the people who measure the air quality started issuing just three kinds of daily forecasts: Poor, Awful, and See-How-Long-You-Can-Hold-Your-Breath.

I hope that those of you who are new to Washington will get a chance to go across the river and visit it. It is a beautiful city, but a confusing one in many ways.

Traffic, for example.

Several years ago a friend came up here from my home in Little Rock, Arkansas, to work. But he didn't like it and after a few days called me to say he was going home that night.

The next morning he walked into my office.

"I thought you went home," I said to him;

Address by Carol Tucker Foreman, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services, to meeting of United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, Arlington, VA, Tuesday, September 27, 1977 at 8:30 a.m.

"I tried," he said. "But every street I could find went around in circles."

He's still here.

I realize that sometimes it does appear to you that all we do in Washington is go around in circles. And sometimes we have been guilty.

But I'd like to do two things this morning.

I'd like to talk to you briefly about how I think this administration is straightening out some of those circles and heading in a straight line toward a sensible food and agriculture policy.

I can't think of any better example of the change in the Department of Agriculture since Bob Bergland became Secretary last January than the way I spent my weekend two weeks ago.

Some of us from USDA sat for three days listening to 50 citizens from across this country and from across a wide range of political, economic and agricultural thought.

We asked them to give us their ideas on anything remotely connected with food and agriculture.

What should we be doing that we're not doing at USDA?

What should a Department of Agriculture be doing four or five years from now?

Should there even be a Department of Agriculture?

(more)

It was an exciting session. I lost a weekend at home but came away with ammunition for the job that Bob Bergland has asked all of us at USDA to do.

He has said constantly that the department will no longer represent only the interest of one, narrow commercial section of agriculture. Instead it will represent all those touched by agriculture.

And in today's world of instant actions and instant responses, that means everybody.

That's a change. A big one.

There has been another big change in an area that touches your association directly.

As you know, we recently proposed major regulatory changes in the School Lunch Program.

We're changing a number of things in the hope of improving the nutritional quality of the lunches and cutting down on food waste. They are the most significant changes in meal patterns since the lunch program began in 1946.

We're going through a period of public comment on the proposed changes right now and there will be public hearings this fall. By January we hope to have interim regulations in effect and start field testing the new lunch patterns in schools.

But we've already started moving on getting more fresh fruits and vegetables into the program.

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Some weeks ago, the FSQS and FNS staff asked why USDA could not deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to the School Lunch program. It had been six years since any fresh fruit was distributed.

One of the senior career employees gave me a simple answer.

He said: "It can be done. You are the first Assistant Secretary who has shown any interest in getting fresh fruits and vegetables into the schools.

A short time later -- on August 26 -- we announced the purchase of a test shipment of 21 truckloads (17,640 cartons) of fresh Bartlett pears. They are being delivered right now to schools in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Las Vegas, Reno and Boise.

The results of this test shipment will help us determine if it's feasible to use fresh Bartlett pears throughout our national feeding programs.

Of course, there are some question marks. The biggest one is whether our national food distribution network can move fresh produce into the school system efficiently, and whether the schools can handle storage of large quantities of fresh produce.

But I'm optimistic. I think it should work. If I can take a pear home from the supermarket and let it ripen for several days on a window sill, I don't see why the same thing can't work for the school system.

If it does, it means that school children would be benefitting soon from fresh fruits -- and hopefully vegetables as well -- supplied by USDA under its traditional surplus removal authority.

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Besides Bartlett pears, we also are considering whether we can purchase winter pears and apples, oranges and grapefruit for the lunch program.

That means market conditions have to be right for USDA to use its surplus removal authority and buy them.

It means funds have to be available.

It means the schools have to be willing to accept these products.

And it means that students have to want them.

One of the most important of our new School Lunch regulations is the one that requires school food service personnel to involve students and parents in menu planning and improvement of the program.

It's essential.

It doesn't do any good to put different foods into the program if the children are not going to eat them. That's what we're trying to avoid.

As for fresh vegetables, the variety is limited by the realities of distribution system, by children's preferences, and by the surplus removal factors I have mentioned.

But we think possible candidates might be fresh potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions and carrots.

We don't have any recent experience in handling such foods. So we have to test it, and we are going to do so.

We think fresh fruits and vegetables belong in our School Lunch program. And wherever we can use them to the benefit of the children, the schools, and the producers, we will.

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As that career employee at FNS pointed out -- that's a change.

There's another one.

For a long time, the Department of Agriculture has paid more attention to the production of food than it has to its consumption. We have known more at USDA about the dietary needs of a dairy cow or pig than we have about the kinds of food a pregnant woman should eat to assure the health of her unborn child and herself.

But that's changing, too.

Now almost two-thirds of the USDA budget goes to feed hungry people in this country -- through Food Stamps, the School Lunch program, School Breakfast, Summer Food, Food Assistance for the Elderly, and the Women, Infant, Children feeding program.

Congress took note of this in the new Farm Bill and designated the Department of Agriculture as the "lead agency" in the Federal government on the matter of nutrition research.

We have been charged with recommending policies and supporting and implementing programs that provide good nutrition.

And we're going to do it.

One of the ways we are going to do it is with an expanded human nutrition research program. We're going to try to find out the nutritional consequences of government policies in such areas as food production, processing, and distribution.

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We need to identify the differences in nutritional requirements between men and women, for people of all ages, for people working under different job and stress conditions.

We need to know more about the nutritional quality of the food we eat.

We need to know more about what production, processing and handling does to the nutrient content of those foods.

We need to know why people choose one food over another.

And, finally, we need to know a lot more about how well off, nutritionally, the people of this country are.

Also:

* Congress, under the Child Nutrition Act, gave us the funds to make \$1 million in grants to states for model nutrition projects aimed at children.

* The new food and farm bill calls for us to step up our nutrition education efforts for food stamp recipients. In the past we've had a relatively small program, operated by the Extension Service, that reached only about five percent of these people.

Operating on the old theory that if you can't lick 'em, join 'em, we're going to try to spread nutrition awareness by another means, too.

Television and radio.

The Department is working on plans for a media information campaign to encourage people to eat wisely. The hope is that it will provide some balance to what people see and hear every day of their lives about food.

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And, as you know, they see and hear a lot.

Studies show us that television is watched most often and believed most completely by the young, the poor, and the elderly.

The very people who most need sound nutrition information and the least likely to get it from other sources.

Upwards of \$1 billion a year is spent to advertise and encourage us to eat various foods. Roughly \$250 million of that is aimed at children.

We're told that children see an average of 240 food ads -- or two hours' worth -- each week. By the time a television-watcher of that type reaches 18, he or she probably will have seen 175,000 food commercials.

That's not all necessarily bad.

But we want them to see and hear something other than those marvelous testimonials to such things as Kaboom and Count Chocula that come out to the TV set at my children every Saturday morning.

Not only are the commercials selling something of dubious nutritional value, but they are contributing to the prices for food that you and I pay. Last year advertising accounted for three percent of the nation's total food bill.

I hope we're not too late.

Several years ago there was a very popular book titled "You are What You Eat."

Sometimes I think that America is becoming what it is eating.

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We like for things to happen fast in this country.

But good things don't always come fast. The changes I've talked to you about this morning are going to take some time. But they are under way.

I'm an optimist.

I keep thinking that the day could come when the biggest thing to an inner-city kid on a hot summer day will not be a Marshmallow-Zappo-on-a-Stick or whatever, but a dripping, fresh peach.

Or an ice-cold carrot or piece of celery.

That could be the fast food craze of the next generation. I hope it will be.

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